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ABSTRACT

College language teachers should become more aware of the needs of the job market and the specific ways that language majors can use their unique characteristics to satisfy those needs. Then students must be made aware of this information. The principles of marketing can be used to examine job requirements. Steps in applying these principles include: (1) identifying the special characteristics of language students that represent a product to be marketed to employers; (2) identifying potential employers and establishing a profile that will describe their needs; (3) considering the place at which employer and employee are linked; (4) planning strategies for promotion of the product; and (5) becoming aware of economic issues that affect "price." Teachers deal with matters of "product" daily in teaching and curriculum planning. "Profile" and "place" can be approached by the campus placement office. Teachers' responsibility in the area of price awareness is to inform students of the relationship between profit-making corporations and the liberal arts. It is primarily in "promotion" that language teachers can adjust current levels of activity and strategies. An excerpt from a college promotional brochure and a graph illustrating application of marketing mix elements to job placement are appended. Contains 8 references. (MSE)

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PREPARING FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

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Preparing Foreign Language Students for Today's Job Market

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INTRODUCTORY MINI-DRAMA

Scene: Students waiting in the procession line just before graduation ceremony begins. Student A chats with Student B.

Student A: I'm glad I don't have to to worry about getting a job. My college loans will be paid off soon 'cause my year's salary will be $35,000 and the benefit package is fantastic.

Student B: Really??? How'd you get that job?

A: Wasn't much to it. I just wrote up a few resumes and left them in some folders at the Placement Office. Then the calls started coming.

B: I tried stuffing those folders too and no one called. I guess ....I guess I chose the wrong major.

A. Yeah. Maybe you did.

And now for a bit of nostalgia as we play, "What's my Line?." What major do you suppose Student B. might have chosen?

It would not be surprising to hear that you supposed that student's major might have been in foreign languages. If you did, you were entirely correct. Our little mini-drama carries with it some implications. Which of the following thoughts do you think were implied?

- Foreign language majors are not qualified for any jobs.

- No jobs are available to foreign language majors.

The answer we propose is "none of the above." We suggest that neither foreign language faculty members nor their students are sufficiently familiar with the existing job market. The result is a communications gap which causes the apparent anomaly in our mini-drama. The language teaching profession needs to become at least peripherally aware of the needs of the job market and the specific ways that language majors can use some of their unique characteristics to satisfy those needs. Then, the profession needs to convey its newfound information to students.

Perhaps you are a humanist. Perhaps you feel that anything that exists is, by virtue of existence, worthy of study. Although you may believe that our respective interests in teaching and retailing would cause us to disagree with that notion, we are, in truth, firm supporters of it. That kind of thought, after all, is essential to the philosophy of all education, including our own. It enables scholars to study anything that piques their curiosity. It obligates teacher-scholars to share that study with their students. However, we submit that it cannot, therefore, be said that teachers have no obligation to guide students in ways to use skills acquired in foreign language classes for other than scholarly purposes. One of the foreign language field's better known scholars has said that a degree in foreign languages is not marketable and, therefore, mention of the employability of foreign language students is somehow unethical (6). We beg to differ. It is unethical to promise what one cannot deliver. It is true

that there is limited demand by any given company for proficient foreign language speakers to enter a hungry job market. It is also true that we have known more than one starry-eyed student with dreams of being an interpreter at the United Nations. We cannot deliver a realization of that student's dream. What we can deliver, however is awareness of what entry level jobs do require of any applicant with a college degree. Careful examination of those requirements and subsequent efforts to clarify them for our students can make it possible for them to benefit from the self-actualization that a liberal education offers and still enter the job market with confidence.

We suggest that the principles of marketing can serve as a basis for said examination. These principles are: (1) Identify the special characteristics of language students that represent a **PRODUCT** to be marketed to employers. (2) Identify potential employers and establish a **PROFILE** that will describe the their needs. (3) Consider the **PLACE** at which employers and employees are linked. (4) Plan out the strategies for **PROMOTION** of the product and (5) Become aware of an array of economic issues which we categorize as those of **PRICE** . Our purpose here is to discuss these principles of marketing ("the five p's") and to outline ways and means to apply each of them to the context of a foreign language department that wishes to approach issues such as employment of its majors.

We will begin with the principle of PRODUCT. To refer to a student as "product." is sure to be anathema to any humanist worthy of the name. For that reason we run the risk of unnecessary repetition by again saying that that we propose the marketing of skills offered as benefits to the

prospective employer rather than the treatment of human beings as mere product.

In marketing, products are often described in terms of the benefits they offer the customer, so our first task is to determine what some of those benefits are. Asked to name one characteristic that few other majors have, we would cite listening ability, a subset of the communication skills so avidly sought by employers (8). Language teachers who spend most of their classroom time using the target language are giving their students a unique kind of communication practice. Listening, widely thought to be an essential skill for communication (7), is thoroughly practiced in the language classroom even though it disappears from the curricula of non-foreign language students before they reach the age of ten. The key issue is that the listening practice that occurs in the classroom sharpens the same skill that makes it possible to be thought of as an effective and empathic employee

and leader. Foreign language majors are unusually skillful listeners. For proof, ask your majors who in their particular residential unit acts as a counselor to friends and acquaintances. "Oh, I'm the one they all come to," is the modal reply and that pretty well illustrates the correlation. There is no immediate need to consider whether it is a question of cause and effect. It is sufficient to note that foreign language majors have this skill that most other people tend not to have.

Employers also seek employees who understand other people (8) and the literary and cultural education that our majors receive enhances their sensitivity to the idea that not all people approach all problems with the same set of assumptions. An ability to think in a divergent fashion is not the

sole property of the language major, but it certainly is one characteristic to be found among the overwhelming majority of our students.

Similarly, communications skills other than listening may not so much the exclusive domain of the foreign language learner, but it is true that our majors have excellent verbal skills and little need of the widely advertised vocabulary enrichment recordings touted by salespeople who tell us that the tapes will make leaders out of followers.

The marketing principle of product tells us to know our students, to be aware not only of their weaknesses, but of their strengths -- especially those which are the very things employers seek.

Let us continue with the PROFILE of employers. The first job for the faculty member who would know more about potential employers of his students is reading. Foreign language faculty members of our acquaintance tend to be less than comfortably familiar with the kinds of jobs that their graduates take or the environment in which their employers operate. Naisbitt and Aburdene (5) would be a good place to begin. Casual reading alone reveals that the employment picture for liberal arts graduates is nowhere nearly as bleak as they have probably thought. The foreign language major does not face a set of pre-employment obstacles that are radically different from those of other graduates. It is not mere possession of a specific degree that gets one a job. It is essential to read such sources as the report of surveys by Useem (8) along with work like Goodman's (3) to get some notion of the kinds of employment likely to be available nationally. Useem's surveys, for example, show that corporations seek other than business majors alone. Although foreign language faculty may assume otherwise, foreign language majors with peripheral exposure to business (such as summer jobs) are just as much in demand as others.

The single most important source of help, particularly in establishing the required profile, is the college placement office. Early on in communications with the placement office, one will want to be sure that the placement officers are aware of Useem's work (8) which shows that, while there may not be large numbers of hirings of liberal arts majors that can be directly attributed to knowledge of a foreign language, there are employers who seek people with exceptional communicative skills, an understanding of people, an appreciation of ethical principles, and an ability to innovate. These are needs that employers have expressed in one survey after another. With the help of an understanding placement officer, it should be possible to profile the firms most likely to be interested in the graduates of one's own school by listing the needs that those firms most frequently express. The principle of profiling, then, directs us to know the employer much as a salesperson knows his or her customer.

By considering the marketing principle of PLACE, one becomes aware of the various arenas in which hiring occurs. It is important to know that hiring is a function that is not limited by place. It may occur by mail, phone, or FAX in the transmission of resumés and cover letters. It may occur in person on the premises of the employer or in the college placement office. The marketing principle of place tells us that if we assume that there is only one place where jobs are secured and our "product," the student, is promoted, then a great many employment opportunities will be missed.

PROMOTION is the most important of the five marketing principles presented here. It consists of an array of efforts to link profiled needs with the product and includes salesmanship as an important element, but it also includes efforts on the part of the faculty and students to

facilitate opportunities to meet employer needs. If needs for business oriented coursework or post-graduate seminars on the nature of the business world are revealed by the profile process, they should be met (2). Establishing seminars on job search procedures, gathering employer information files, organizing career fairs, arranging for guest speakers to present employer needs, and adding business-oriented elements to year abroad programs are things that can be done by faculty members with the assistance of such groups as language honoraries and other student groups. Other elements of the promotion principle that require facilitative efforts from students and faculty members working together include establishing a resumé booklet, assistance in resumé production, writing brochures as described below, and working directly with campus placement offices to facilitate the interaction of faculty members and employer representatives on a regular basis. That interaction is of critical importance to faculty members who wish to learn about the true nature of job market their students face.

Only after these facilitative efforts have been made, is it time to turn to elements of promotion that directly link employer needs with students abilities. This linkage is called positioning by marketing experts like Kotler (4). Effective positioning means matching the product with elements of the profile, or matching benefits offered by the prospective employee with needs sought by employers.

In order to promote, one must consider the other four principles of marketing. They are closely interrelated. Of most immediate importance is the principle of place. One must consider the places at which the function of job placement occurs. Doing so will suggest a wide range of possible media for promotion.Video production, job fairs, internships, direct mail,

and catalogs of resumés are all tools that have resulted in placement. One medium that is successfully used by the Department of Consumer Sciences and Retailing at Purdue University is the brochure excerpted in Figure 1. This brochure describes students in terms of the benefits they offer prospective employers rather than in academic terms. It would be a simple matter to adjust this brochure in accord with the principle of product and use it to tell prospective employers about graduates of one's foreign language department. The principle of profile comes into play here because the most effective brochure known does little good if it sits on a shelf begging for distribution. While faculty members have the primary responsibility for distributing the brochure to prospective employers, placement officers and the media will be essential aids in finding out how to deliver such a brochure to the "point of sale."

Efforts to promote foreign language majors in the job market are a responsibility of faculty members and the departments in which they work. We must share these responsibilities with those better prepared to carry out certain of their aspects. That is the only way to make this relatively new responsibility into a manageable task. Thus, student honoraries can do the legwork of establishing files of employer information, resumé booklets, employer contact, and career fairs. Placement officers also make considerable efforts to educate employers, maintain information files, distribute student resumés. Both groups, however, need the knowledge, insight, and support of foreign language faculty members. We are the people who can help students enlist the aid various campus offices; we are the people who ought to meet prospective employers to assure that our students are properly represented.

PRICE is the final principle of marketing. Faculty members have little to do with the "price of our product" (i.e. the salaries offered to our majors upon employment), but they do need to be at least vaguely aware of them . The principle of price also includes other economic issues. Cordisco and Walker (2)
point out that employers want the various skills that liberal arts majors offer but that they also want a basic understanding of the nature of the business world. Surprisingly, even summer jobs or relatively few business courses would be adequate to assure prospective employers of an interest in and understanding of business.(8) To put it bluntly, corporate employers want to be assured that the liberal arts graduate they hire believes in the profit motive and can separate it completely from motives of greed with which no employer wishes to associate his or her commercial endeavor.

We have presented some essential principles of marketing and we have made mention of ways to apply them to the context of the foreign language department, as summarized in Figure 2. Now you must decide whether it is necessary or even ethical to use those principles to try to enhance the employablility of language students. Perhaps you feel no obligation to do so. Perhaps you see it as unethical. We would urge further thought on the matter. It is true that humanistic study is its own justification. We seek truths and beauties, letting application fall where it may. Why should we do otherwise? Perhaps the answer lies in just how well protected from the outside world your department is. If enrollments do not matter; if faculty lines do not matter; if departmental funding does not matter, and if the ways students' lives turn out after leaving campus do not matter, one would be well advised to ignore us. The truth, however, is more likely to be that these things do matter ...at least as much as the

truths and beauties we seek in scholarly efforts. Students' lives are of particular importance since they are the reason that many people become teachers in the first place. Further, Neil H. Borden (1) points out that the successful marketer is (a) perceptive and practical in establishing views of individual and group behavior; (b) can, through analysis, foresee changes that develop in a dynamic world; and (c) develops creative, well - knit programs because of a capacity to make judgments about potential human response. It is possible to infer that successful marketers are successful humanists.

We, as teachers, have an obligation to pay close attention to the principles of marketing as they apply to students, our most important product. A lot of new work is not involved. We deal with matters of PRODUCT as part of our daily work by teaching and planning curricula. etc. The principles of PROFILE and PLACE can be approached by the campus placement office, so long as an administrative connection assures a linkage between the two campus units. It is essential to see to it that placement officers know our students' special abilities and have some understanding of how to connect them to employer needs. Our responsibility in the arena of PRICE is awareness of the need to inform students of the interrelationship between profit making corporations and the liberal arts our society has established. It is primarily in PROMOTION that we may need to adjust our current levels and strategies of activity. It would certainly be worthwhile for our students and for the benefit of our own departments to take steps to do so now. Nonetheless, marketing plans can only be successful when all five elements are included in our plans. Marketing is a systematic effort. Diminution of one element harms the whole.

We as foreign language teachers know we educate students who are well worth the attention of prospective employers. That being the case, we have an obligation to make use of the systematic structure of marketing to promote our product. It is not only ethical to do so; it is irresponsible to do otherwise.

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Figure 1

Excerpt from a Promotional Brochure

Financial counselors/planners can orchestrate your client's financial needs . . .

Examples of common financial problems needing attention today are cash shortages, problems with creditors, loss of services, housing decisions, bankruptcy. Financial Counseling and Planning graduates can generate possible solutions and advice for these problems and many more. . . .

Knowledge base:

The financial planning program includes solid grounding in the principles of risk and investment management, accounting and tax strategies, the time value of money, business and consumer law, estate planning, retirement planning, employee benefits planning, and financial planning. These financial areas are backed up with course work in accounting, business law, consumer policy, family life, consumer behavior, economics, mathematics, statistics, computer science, counseling and interviewing techniques, psychology, and family studies.

Counseling skills:

Every financial counseling student takes courses to develop counseling and interviewing skills useful for client practice. Graduates of this program have learned how to build rapport, assist clients to identify and prioritize goals, and lead clients through problem solving processes. Course work in counseling techniques is put into actual practice through client contact. Purdue students work in real counseling situations to apply behavioral science and communications background to help clients solve their financial problems and generate goals and objectives.

Communication skills:

Graduates are well grounded in both oral and written communication skills. The program includes several courses in public speaking, interviewing/counseling, and writing.

Data management skills:

Graduates possess the necessary skills to gather and prepare data for counselor and/or computer use, conduct analyses, interpret data and adjust for the unique needs of each client, perform financial and tax calculations, and present financial advice in an understandable and usable form for your client.

Client experience:

Every financial counseling and planning major is exposed to low, middle, and high income financial problems, and to actual clients. They are aware of the differing needs of clients and are prepared to conduct the data gathering, analysis, and assessment necessary to assist a variety of clients for both present and future needs.

Purdue's Strengths

- The Purdue Financial Counseling and Planning program is housed in the School of Consumer and Family Sciences. This school is ranked third in the country by the *Gourman Report*.
- Our faculty have excellent financial training and are actively conducting research related to consumer finance practices and issues.
- Purdue students have access to course work in the Krannert School of Management, which is well known for its general management programs.
- Purdue has an on-campus placement service which can assist you in seeking qualified employees. This campus unit provides many services to the industry which can be advantageous as you seek to contact prospective employees.

Purdue was recognized recently by the *Financial Planner* for the quality of its Financial Counseling and Planning program.

The Purdue program includes the same content required for certificates widely publicized in the financial planning field. In addition, Purdue graduates earn a well-rounded four-year degree which gives them the skills and savvy needed to earn management-level positions in your company, and they gain actual client experience.

It's a people business . . .

and employing personable, enthusiastic, productive people helps to build good client relations.

Get the most from your human resource dollar investment and enjoy employees who will help you prove the wisdom of your decision to hire them. Come to Purdue when you need personnel. Our graduates will earn their place in your organization.

Purdue financial counselors/planners analyze your clients' financial positions and communicate proposed financial strategies.

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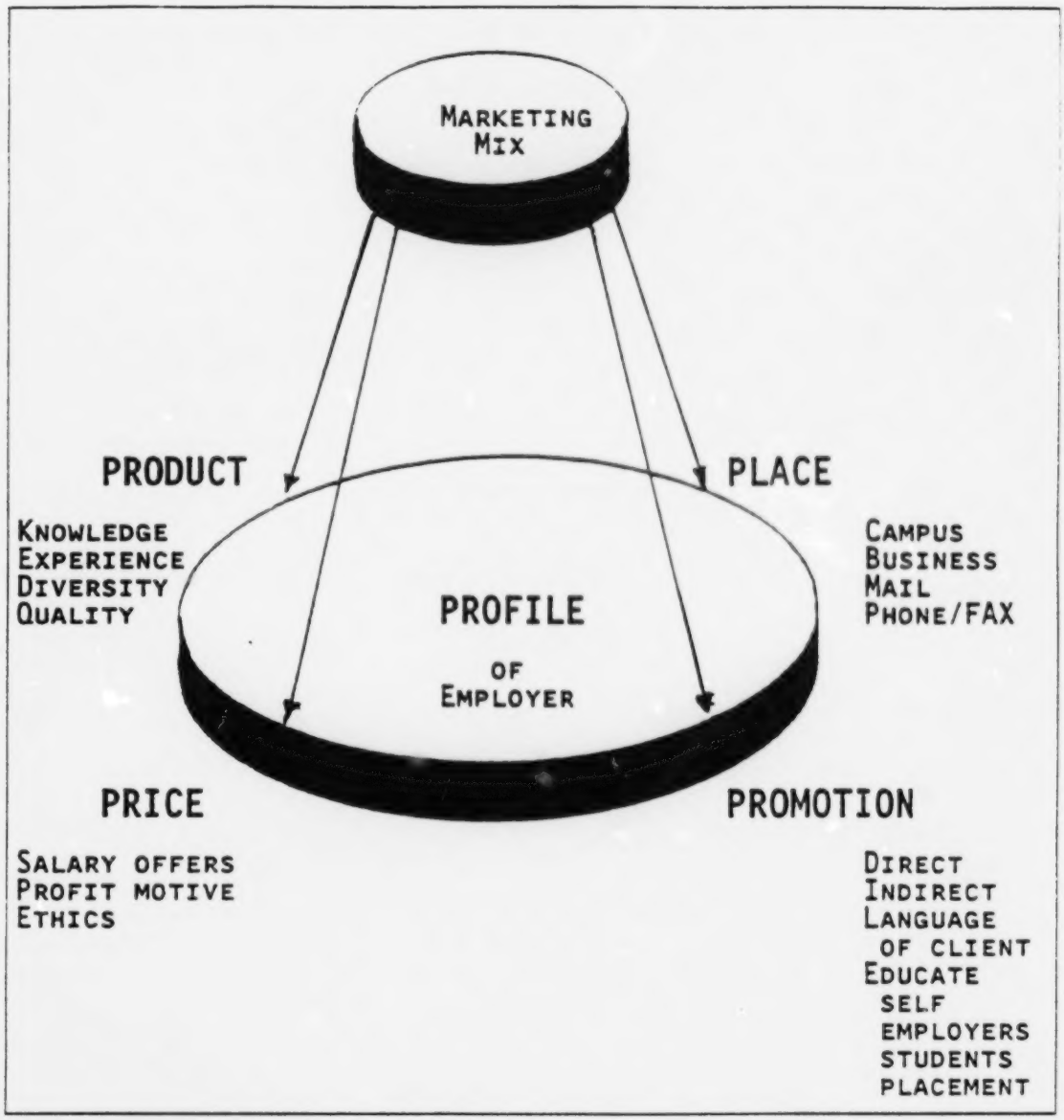

ADAPTED FROM KOTLER, P. 43.

FIGURE 2

APPLICATION OF MARKETING MIX "5 P'S" TO PLACEMENT OF GRADUATES